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By-Gartner, Alan; Riessman, Frank

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There are probably over 300,000 persons working as paraprofessionals now, most of them in public schools, health institutions, and the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO). In the past year major strides have been made in organizing these human service workers to satisfy their concerns for better services, closer community ties, and new avenues of advancement. Representative of the trend was the formation of a National Association of New Careerists (growing out of the 1968 New Careers National Council) which now has participants in 22 cities. Such associations can work in harmony with present public service unions in education, health, welfare, and government employment. Minimum demands such as training, upgrading, and changing of testing requirements are not antithetical to traditional union positions, while such demands as participation, community involvement, change in the character of service, and rights of workers in a broader sense may require the new types of organization. Since it seems likely that demands by the new public employees unions will affect public service employees at all levels, union strategy should be planned so that benefits for paraprofessionals are not obtained at the expense of the older, higher groups. (Included are lists of typical paraprofessional demands and suggestions regarding union and association strategy.) (JS)

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PARAPROFESSIONALS, THEIR ORGANIZATION, AND THE UNIONS

Alan Gartner and Frank Riessman

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THE "WORK-IN"

"On June 19, at 7 a.m. - as Solidarity Day was starting for 50,000 other poor people in Washington - more than sixty psychiatric aides and other "serfs of the Kansas mental hospital system" moved quietly into eight wards of the Topeka State Hospital and took "administrative and clinical control.

"Instead of witholding their labor by going on strike, the workers put on a "Hospital Improvement Action" under the slogan "We Care!" For twelve hours psychiatric aides - among the most highly skilled workers in the hospital system - created their model of how a hospital ward should be run.

"Thus began a most unusual union action: workers made the point that they were more concerned about proper patient care than were the Kansas authorities. In the weeks since the Improvement Action, they have proved to the community that patient care must begin with proper working conditions for the psychiatric aides and other non-professionals. The example of the Topeka Hospital Improvement Action initiated a precedent-setting strategy for workers in the field of human services. It highlighted the excruciating role of the nonprofessional; often, as with the psychiatric aides, he does professional work for the lowest pay. He is the key service worker; the condition of the service depends upon upgrading the job and providing him with training, a career ladder, higher pay and better working conditions."

These excerpts from Alex Efthim's Nation article,""We Care" in Kansas: The Non-Professionals Revolt" (August 5, 1968), point to dramatic new trends in the human services -- the organizing of the workers of human service agencies not only for "bread and butter" demands but for the improvement of the quality of those services and the linkage of these new demands with the participatory demands of black and community power forces in contemporary society. Unique in the activities of the Topeka aides, and common to New Careerists in general, is the concern for multiple benefits -- not of the aides versus someone else but of the aides for better service, closer community ties, new avenues to advancement; indeed the slogan "We Care" typifies this new effort.

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There are probably now in excess of 300,000 persons working as paraprofessionals in various human service agencies with public schools, OEO, and health institutions being the largest employer. While estimates vary, it is clear that there are large numbers of present jobs available but unfilled. Greenleigh Associates estimates a total potential need of 4.3 million jobs, and human service work is the great growth area of the American economy -- up as much as 100% in the next decade according to the Labor Department's "Occupational Outlook Handbook."

The development of paraprofessional opportunities has not been without effort and conflict. For some there have been the questions of whether non=credentialed persons could perform other than menial positions, the traditional orderly and nurse's aide positions in the hospital are examples of these "old" paraprofessional jobs, dead-ended without any sense that the holder played an important part in the therapeutic process. Others have been concerned with the response of the professionals to the introduction of these new workers, doubly new when we recognize that the paraprofessionals are often minority group members while the professionals are predominantly white. Administrators have been concerned with questions of supervision, chains of command, organizational plans, and budgetary support. Until recent date there has been little organized concern from those most directly affected by these developments, the para-professionals themselves.

Major strides have been made in the organizing of human service workers in the past year, however. Mass meetings have been held, for example, in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Detroit, and Washington, D.C., of persons employed in so-called "New Careers" programs as well as those in other poverty programs. In Los Angeles plans are underway to organize the more than 7,000 poverty program workers there, while in New York City

a Citywide Paraprofessional Organization already exists with membership from nearly a score of agencies throughout the city. Growing out of the convening convention of the New Careers National Council, held in Detroit last June, a National Association of New Careerists has been formed. The group has participants in some twenty-two cities, has selected officers, held several local meetings, and is ready to move into full operation.

The Paraprofessional's Demands

Paraprofessionals are principly concerned with five interrelated areas:

1. The concerns of its members regarding wages, training stipends, increments, as well as the special concerns of those employed as paraprofessionals in agencies funded with federal funds such as grant termination, eligibility for such fringe benefits as sick leave, vacations, seniority rights, etc.

2. Special concerns of paraprofessionals relate to issues of status -- Where does the teacher aide eat? In the teachers lunchroom or as has happened, in a special section of the student area?

3. Opportunities for meaningful work, relevant training, education and upgrading within the particular agency where the paraprofessional works, as well as the development of methods for lateral and diagonal movement between agencies. Another set of concerns relates to issues around testing, civil service regulations, credentialling, credit for work-experience and life experience, adequate job descriptions.

4. Relationships between the human service agencies and the communities which they serve. The paraprofessionals as persons coming from these communities, and continuing to be a part of them, are of course a bridge between the two and are often hired for that purpose; however, the nature and quality of the service which the agency renders is critical to the community and the paraprofessional may not see himself as a neutral agent simply allowing himself to be the link between poor service and poor people. Not only the quality of service but also the processes the agency goes through in determining the service are concerns of the paraprofessional both in terms of the participation of the staff who delivers it and the community which is the recipient.

5. The need for workers in the human services to bring together their various perspectives and agency activities so that there is established a coordinated approach to human service work. Paraprofessionals coming together from education, health, social welfare agencies, form in effect, an industrial as opposed to craft approach to organization.

The connection between the organization of paraprofessionals and present union groups is critical. Some of the activities of the paraprofessionals are similar to those of unions but we do not believe that they are necessarily competitive. While the first of the concerns described above is closely akin to union type activities, the others go beyond traditional union activities. We envision many new careerists, as is currently the case, being members of unions in addition to their participation in a new careerist association and in some cases paraprofessionals may form their own committees (or caucuses) within unions to advance their special concerns. This is not significantly different from the multiple memberships of various professionals, or participation of union members in their own union as well as in the Negro American Labor Council. A new careerist association can work in harmony and not compete with the unions in that the concerns of paraprofessionals are not limited to the arbitrary union distinction between employees of public or private agencies performing the same type of service (the distinction in New York City, for example, between District Council 37 and Local 1199, both organizing hospital workers differentiated only by their place of employment), nor the difference between human service work done in the school or in a welfare department (the distinction here, for example, between membership in the UFT or SSEU). The mutuality of concerns is

illustrated by the membership on the governing board of the new National Council on New Careers of the AFT's new president Dave Selden and the president of AFSCME's largest local group, District Council 37, Victor Gotbaum.

UNIONS AND NEW CAREERS FOR THE NON-PROFESSIONALS

It seems likely that New Careers demands by the new public employees unions will spread rapidly in the coming period in at least two directions.

One is organizing the new paraprofessionals and it would, of course, be most logical for the union then to reflect their demands for training and upgrading. This is already the case with regard to the organization of Case Aides by the Social Services Employees Union in New York and San Francisco. Similarly, the recent organization of the Kansas Mental Health Workers by the State County and Municipal Workers Union calls for training and upgrading, as well as some new dimensions with regard to the nature of services, as the quotation above indicates.

But a second and most significant spread of New Careers demands by unions will undoubtedly relate to various employees in higher positions other than the paraprofessionals. Thus, city employees at all levels who see excellent new demands made for entering workers will ask the question, why not me too? Why can't I get released time, education on-the-job, more rapid upgrading based on tests that are appropriate to the job?

Here we are not talking of the employed poor, the nurses aides, school aides and so on, who naturally are concerned about obtaining some of the New Careers benefits themselves but rather we are referring to the

entire range of civil service employees who are beginning to see the relevance of the New Careers demands -- this might include policemen, nurses, case workers in Departments of Welfare. (In NYC's Social Services Department case workers won a line as senior case workers, as a middle step in between case workers and supervisors).

Many of the developments we are referring to are heavily concentrated in the New York City area. The question to consider, however, is whether these New Careers demands will catch on nationally and become a major focus for the public service unions -- AFT, State County and Municipal Workers, the Federation of Social Work Employees, hospital unions, etc. The Kansas Mental Health strike is highly significant in this regard, particularly in light of the fact that the national union was brought in and became involved when the local union was not able to adopt a progressive New Careers stand.

Another factor likely to have an effect in the national spread of this program is the fact that the paraprofessionals are organizing themselves in a number of cities throughout the country. They serve as a prod and a monitor to the unions functioning in their areas. Moreover, minimum New Careers demands such as training, upgrading, changing of testing requirements, are relatively easy for unions to adopt; there is little that is antithetical to the traditional trade union position -- it is merely an extension of this position to new areas of demands and new agendas. Whether the unions can adopt other New Careers demands such as participation, community involvement, change in the character of the services, rights of workers in a broader sense, demands which are not necessarily consistent with traditional union philosophy,

is yet another question. The embodiment of these demands, we believe, may require a new type of organization such as the National Association of New Careerists, but in some cases local unions may adopt some of them.

There are a number of other questions which need to be considered. For example, when unions demand wages, fringe benefits, and so forth, can they also demand increased training time and career ladders which may be costly to the employer? Is there a zero sum game in which only a certain number of benefits can be achieved? Or does the union by raising some of the New Careers demands provide an expanding universe of possibilities at least to some degree? This may be doubly attractive to workers because these benefits are, in a sense, additions beyond what they could have gotten on the basis of the previous union strategy related to wages and benefits?(1) Is the tradition likely to arise in this age that some of the New Careers demands become basic (fringe) benefits that all the workers must have access to because they represent basic new needs and new rights, e.g. the right to education and training while working; the right to college accreditations for in-service training, on-the-job experience, and life experience; the right to move up more than one step, to make a qualitative leap in a career pattern.

Union strategy may opt for the quick development of precedents for these rights and needs, so that an expanding package of benefits can be obtained in the bargaining.(2) Such a demand involves the union immediately in pointing out the benefits to the employer of added training and education as well as its morale building effect, and the need for this especially in the more disorganized hospital field.

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(1) Local 1199's contract pakcage which included both the unions maximum wage demand (a minimum wage of $100 a week) and the 1% upgrading fund indicates in at least this instance it is not a zero sum game.

(2) The victory of the Hospital Workers Local 1199 of a 1% fund for training and upgrading is already being emulated as the city's Hotel and Motel workers are now demanding a similar fund in their contract negotiations.

In negotiations for an education program, the employer (the city or state) may be able to respond by utilizing its influence on the universities, community colleges (where state and local government pay two-thirds of the cost), to provide training, course credits for on-the-job experience, etc. This provides the employer with an expanding universe of supplies to meet the expanding demands being made by the new workers and unions.

This new strategy also involves the union very rapidly in a relationship to the community and the demands of the poor and the ghetto. If serious upgrading is to take place, new entry positions will be opened to the community through the career ladder supported by the union. These new workers will logically be organized by the unions or para-professional associations. The major public service unions in education, health, welfare and government employment, after some initial resistence, have very quickly made an adaptation to involving the new paraprofessional workers and organizing them, fighting for their upgrading and training and have adopted significant New Career demands.

A major requirement of any effective strategy should be a built-in propensity or probability for spread -- in other words, achieving A should lead very likely to the happening of B and C. We are suggesting that the New Careers demands of the unemployed poor, the employed poor, and the general civil service city/state employees is likely to function in just such a fashion so that benefits for the new group are not obtained at the expense of benefits for the older higher groups.